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AUTHOR Kochan, Frances K.; Reed, Cynthia J.; Twale, Darla J.; Jones, Virginia C.

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ABSTRACT

The past decade has been filled with widespread calls to institute systemic change in schools. This paper shares insights gained from one program that shifted from a traditional organizational view of educational leadership preparation to an inclusive approach that emphasizes community building. The Educational Leadership Program drew on four theoretical frames: Sergiovanni's notion of community, Senge's five disciplines and systems approach to change, Hargreaves' concept of reculturing, and Sarason's call to revise education and the roles of educators. During formation of the program various concepts were emphasized: all knowledge and people are to be respected; everyone is a self-directed, life-long learner; the fields of practice and theory are integrated; and bonds between people create a sense of belonging. The text details how external networks were expanded, how curriculum and instructional strategies were revised to support the model and the mission, how community was enhanced through cohorts, and how activities were used to enhance communication among and between various groups. After 4 years, participants were able to create a conceptual framework in which they brought together a diversity of voices to create a mission. Some of the many challenges in creating such a model are discussed. (Contains 46 references.) (RJM)

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Restructuring an Educational Leadership Program: A Journey from Organization to Community

Frances K. Kochan, Associate Professor *

Cynthia J. Reed, Assistant Professor

Darla J. Twale, Associate Professor

Virginia C. Jones, Graduate Student

Auburn University

* Corresponding Author

2195 Haley Center

Auburn University, AL 36849-5221

334-844-4488

kochafr@mail.auburn.edu

College of Education

Auburn University, AL

334-844-3066

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Restructuring an Educational Leadership Program: A Journey from Organization to Community

Introduction

The past decade has been filled with widespread calls to institute systemic change in schools (Holmes, 1990). This movement has helped stimulate a concomitant drive to revise programs that educate leaders for these restructured schools (Carnegie Forum, 1986, McCarthy, 1993). One challenge for educational leadership faculty is to develop a framework and vision around which to revise their programs. Over the past four years, we have been engaged in developing such a framework for our Educational Leadership Program. This has involved restructuring our program, relationships, and methods of operation. Our guiding metaphor throughout this process has been the creation of a "community of learners." The purpose of this paper is to share insights that we have gained as we shifted from a traditional organizational view of our educational leadership preparation program to a more inclusive approach that emphasizes community building.

Creating A Community Of Learners

The concept of community has existed since people chose to live together for the mutual benefit of all. It is a group of individuals who are bound together by natural will and a set of shared values (Kowch &Schweir, 1997). Aristotle wrote of community in Nichomachoean Ethics, (1962) describing it as being about harmony. The word community has its foundations in the Indo-European base, mei, meaning change or exchange. Joining this with the root kom, meaning with, results in kommein or change and exchange shared by all (Senge et al. 1994). The concept of community is also firmly rooted in our democratic ideals. It was reflected in the Plymouth, Quaker, and Shaker settlements of our young nation (Brown & Isaacs, 1995). It also resonates in the use of town meetings and volunteer organizations in today's society.

Communities are defined by their centers, or repositories of values, sentiments and beliefs that provide the needed cement for bonding people to a common cause (Sergiovanni, 1994).

Communities have also been described as shapeless and borderless entities with egalitarian relationships among their members which contribute to learning and problem solving in an atmosphere of trust and support (Lieberman, 1996).

Kowch and Schweir (1997) describe a learning community as independent individuals engaged in influencing one another within a learning process. We have defined our community, with its focus on learning, as a group with a common belief in the value of one another's knowledge and experiences in which all can learn from one another. Accepting the German concept of community, Geminschaft, which is described as a living organism, to us creating a community of learners is not simply "doing something." It is "becoming something." Modeling Tonnie's (1887/1957) concept that Geminschaft operates not just in physical space but as " the community of mental life" (p.42) we want to create a bond between our community members that will keep them united beyond physical boundaries over time and space.

The strategies used to achieve this goal were (1). Create a vision, mission, and graphic model that support and transmit this concept (2). Create expanded networks to guide our efforts (3) Engage in activities to enhance communication among and between varied groups (4) Revise our curriculum and instructional strategies to support our model and mission.

Theoretical Frameworks

In building our community of learners, we drew from four theoretical frames to guide our deliberations: Sergiovanni's (1994) notion of community; Senge's (1990) five disciplines and systems approach to change; Hargreaves' (1995) concept of reculturing; and Sarason's (1990) call to revise education and the roles of educators. Sergiovanni (1992) suggests that what we believe and value in our institutions frames our views about leadership.. He states that

> Organization is an idea that is imposed from without. To ensure proper fit, schools create management systems that communicate requirements to teachers in the form of expectations. Organizations use rules and regulations, monitoring and supervising, and

evaluation systems to maintain control over teachers. Leadership in organizations, then, is inevitably control driven. (p. 41)

Sergiovanni (1992, 1994) suggests that rather than using the metaphor of schools as organizations, we should move toward conceptualizing schools as communities. When the metaphor of community is utilized in this manner, the emphasis is not on control, but on developing shared values, core beliefs, and community norms that provide the glue that fosters professional ideals and guides and binds together school operations. Through a process of reflection, dialogue, and exploration, collegiality emerges. We want our students to have the capacity to create such environments. We believe, along with Geltner (1994) and the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration in its (1987) report published by the University Council on Educational Administration, that if we expect our graduates to operate as collaborative leaders, our programs must model such collaboration and provide opportunities for students to develop the abilities needed to provide this leadership.

Senge's (1990) five disciplines: personal mastery, mental models, shared visions, team learning, and systems thinking also influenced our thinking and planning. His first discipline, Personal Mastery, involves gaining a deeper sense of self and values while focusing one's energies, developing patience, and learning to see reality objectively.

The second discipline, Mental Models, can be defined as "deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or images that influence our view of the world and the actions we take" (Senge, 1990, p. 8). Although we may not be aware of the mental models that influence our thinking, they nevertheless require that we "turn the mirror inward" (p. 9). Through a process of inquiry, dialogue, and reflection, our mental models can be brought to light, challenged, or verified.

Shared Vision, a third discipline, offers members of a group a set of principles and guiding practices that can serve to bind the group toward a common goal. It infers a sense of common purpose that evolves through opportunities to dialogue and work together. Through this shared

vision, commitment and involvement, not compliance are the goal.

Team Learning, according to Senge, begins with dialoguing. Implied within this dialogue is the need to learn how to recognize patterns of interaction that are counterproductive to the organization. By listening and reflectively sharing thoughts, members can develop a process of thinking together that helps to build a sense of community.

Finally, Systems Thinking, can be defined as a "shift of mind" that moves beyond seeing just ourselves, and instead, offers a view of working together as interrelated parts of a bigger schema. All of these disciplines have been foundational to our efforts. These principles recognize the inter-relatedness of natural, scientific, and economic systems in the world within and outside the educational realm (Janstch, 1980; Wheatley, 1994) and stress the notion that new operational methods focused upon developing collaborative, non-bureaucratic relationships, must be adopted in all areas of management and operation. This is especially true for educational leadership, as the public continues to hold education up to continuous scrutiny.

Hargreaves (1995) believes that a reculturing, or redefining of roles, needs to take place before collective action and dialogue can occur. Rather than cultures of individualism as in the past, he suggests that an emphasis be placed on collaboration and establishing a climate of trust. Although he was dealing with the reculturing of K-12 schools, we believe that his message can be translated into the university leadership development environment. Such reculturing challenges the roles of professors as fonts of knowledge and the top-down instructional practices that are now in place. Finally, Sarason's (1990) call to revise educational practices and roles also implies that the relationship of professor and student needs to be revised so that both reflect the spirit of community and professionalism that we desire.

The Development Process

During our initial discussions we agreed that we would take a systemic view of change that would be transformative, holistic, and continual. We wanted our program to become one in which

all knowledge and people were respected; where all were self-directed, life long learners; where the fields of practice and theory were integrated and interdependent ; and where bonds between people created a sense of belonging to a supportive community. Charged with preparing educational leaders of the future, we grappled with how to offer our students the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and abilities necessary to attain the educational and professional capacity to be collaborative, reflective, supportive, and integrative in their theory and practice.

We began the change process by engaging in biweekly discussions among educational leadership faculty to develop a level of understanding and bonds of friendship and communication that would enable us to share openly and work in a collaborative manner. Our next step was to create an advisory council composed of educational leadership faculty, faculty from outside our area and department, alumni, students, practitioners, and business and community leaders. This diversity in membership permitted us to expand out thinking and knowledge and helped assure that our program would meet the needs of educational leaders as perceived from a variety of perspectives. The council functioned as a task force during our initial developmental year. Through our discussions, readings, and dialogue we created six basic assumptions which would underlie our vision, mission, and program model (Twale et al 1996, p.4-5). Our underlying assumptions are:

1. Change is the only constant (Toffler, 1981).
2. Adult learners bring a wealth of knowledge to the learning/schooling task that should be shared and honored (Brookfield, 1986).
3. Educational leaders of the future will be faced with increasingly complex roles which necessitate leadership skills that differ from those of the past (Kraus & Cordeiro 1995).
4. Educational leaders of the future must be reflective (Sergiovanni, 1991; Short & Rinehart, 1993), collaborative and adaptive (Milstein, 1993), able problem-solvers

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in diverse and varied settings (Allison & Allison, 1993), and cognizant of the interdependence of schools, society, and all who operate within them (Wheatley, 1993),

5. Educational leadership programs must be flexible and dynamic to meet the needs of a changing society and future educational leaders (Cambron-McCabe, 1993),
6. Educational leadership programs should model what they teach and practice what they preach (Kochan & Sabo, 1995).

Creating a vision and a model

Once our assumptions were established, we worked together to develop a collaborative vision. While we teach our students about creating personal visions and assist schools to engage in activities to create them, we had not ourselves moved beyond our own personal visions to develop and embrace a shared one. We viewed this as another opportunity to integrate what we say with what we do. Such shared visions are vital in creating thriving communities (Snyder & Graves, 1994) and enabling leaders to be more team directed (Bennis, 1993). Our shared vision is "to create a program that encompasses the concept of holism, integration, and collaboration." (Twale et al, 1996).This vision created a common identity, steered our program on course, and helped stimulate us to experiment with new ideas and modifications of individual mental models. After we had established our vision, we created a mission statement. The mission of our program is "to provide opportunities for students to develop collaborative leadership abilities as part of a community of learners." This mission is included on our documents, discussed in our classes, used to encourage dialogue, and re-examined on a continual basis to guide program revision and implementation.

Our next step was to create a symbolic model to capture our shared vision and mission (Figure 1). As we designed our model we discussed the need to represent the diverse knowledge that each person brings with them to the program. The model progressed from a linear concept to

one that rested on a foundation which represented the internal community that each member of the community (practitioners, students, faculty) brought to our larger integrated enterprise (Figure 2). The model consciously integrated theory, research, and practice as new knowledge was developed. Through the model, we wanted to imply that theory informs practice and research, and that they each in turn inform theory (Baumann, 1996). Our model assumed that nothing was static, rather that everything was dynamic and responsive to change. We felt that the diagram should be viewed in motion, like a teacup ride at an amusement park, to illustrate that creation of new knowledge occurs as the result of inquiry, assessment, and application. These three domains, research, theory, and practice, if they are to be relevant and reflective of changing times, must "revolve if they are to evolve" (Twale et al, 1996). Student, faculty, alumni, and practitioner ideas are the agents for change that help keep the model vital and moving. The use of these figures enables us to graphically represent our ideas and to communicate them in a simple manner (Kotter, 1990). Having a vision, mission, and graphic model has provided us with useful tools for communicating our program ideals. They are used in presentations, on brochures, and on all program materials to disseminate our perspective.

Expanding External Networks

Schools are a part of the society in which they function (Oliva, 1997; Schubert, 1986). The diversity of our population in terms of demographics and values, makes it imperative that leaders communicate effectively with many publics and have the skills to create a sense of community within their schools and with their constituents (Usdan, 1997). Likewise, it is important for local, state, and national governments, and private industry to have a commitment to the development of educational leaders (UCEA, 1987). One way we have attempted to prepare our students for the role of community leader and model collaboration has been through the creation of a Commission composed of leaders from the Colleges of Education and Business, civic organizations, public administration, governmental services, school systems, the military, and private enterprise. The

members, who are also considered part of our community of learners, serve multiple roles. Since our initial Advisory Council served as a task force during the first year of development only, we believed it was necessary to create an advisory group which would provide input on a continuous basis. This Commission is fulfilling that role. They meet as a group on a quarterly basis to provide input and it is our intent that they will continue to fulfill this role on a long-term basis. Their diverse perspectives have been enormously beneficial in enabling us to reconceptualize our program, expand our concept of community, and broaden our knowledge about community desires, needs, and interests. As individuals, they have been invaluable. They serve as resource experts, as mentors to our students, as political allies, and as sources of information and connections to others in the community with whom we ordinarily have scant contact. For example, having members of the military and business communities attend a meeting with a local politician helped us gain credibility in a rather difficult situation. One of our members has been instrumental in connecting us with someone in the business arena who will provide us free expertise in developing a leadership training program. Their addition as members of our community has expanded our resource base beyond any initial levels we had anticipated.

Revising Curriculum and Instructional Strategies to Support our Model and Mission

If we are to be true to the shared vision behind our model, then curriculum and instructional strategies must support both the model and our program's mission. We drew upon the tenets of transformative curriculum leadership (Henderson & Hawthorne, 1995) to align theory and practice. Transformative curriculum leadership emphasizes fostering the capacity of human beings to understand themselves and their worlds: to grow emotionally, socially, physically, and cognitively; and to continually become more human. We felt strongly about all of these areas and have worked to design curriculum and instructional strategies that are in line with these ideas. Among the instructional strategies we have implemented are: problem-based learning, reflective journaling, collaborative projects, self and peer assessments, games and simulations,and action

and applied research activities as well as those noted by Perkins (1992) as essential in this type or curricular approach: reflective practice; opportunities for dialogue; timely informative feedback; cooperative learning; and mentoring.

Community Through Cohorts

The majority of students in our program are employed on a full-time basis and attend school part-time. With this in mind we believed that we needed a method for building a collaborative and supportive culture that would enhance student ability to develop close relationships and form networks of learning. Therefore we incorporated the concept of cohorts into our program. This type of grouping facilitates conversations and opportunities for students and instructors to continually construct shared meanings about educational issues and strategies and apply Senge's five disciplines. Such cohorts have proven to be of great value in transferring concepts of collaboration and community into the world of practice (Krueger & Milstein, 1995; Twale & Kochan, 1998), reducing isolation and increasing cohesiveness (Bason et al., 1996), enhancing skill development, degree completion, and professional growth. (Crew & Lewis, 1990; Washington, Goddard & Newman, 1990) facilitating self-exploration, and developing increased tolerance and appreciation for others (Norris & Barnett, 1994).

There are two cohort groups in our program. The first is composed of students in the Masters and Administrative Certification tracks. These students take their courses together and engage in a year-long internship in which they share their experiences, visit one another's sites, and form support and communication networks. Alumni who have completed the program and assumed administrative roles are used as resource people who come to meetings to share their experiences. Local educational leaders such as superintendents and principals serve as adjuncts and guest speakers. Thus our community is expanded and enhanced. Feedback on program strengths and weaknesses is gathered from these groups and is continually used to improve the program.

Our second cohort is composed of students seeking a doctoral degree. Their formal cohort

begins in the summer term and continues until the following summer, over five quarters, through a seminar program. The seminar includes four five hour days each quarter in addition to outsidefield-work and other projects. Scheduling for the contact hours of the seminar are determined by mutual consent between the students and the faculty in order to accommodate all schedules. There are 8-15 students involved in each cohort. Students in higher education, public school administration, and administration of curriculum and instruction are combined into a single cohort. This blending stimulates dialogue between and among these student sub-groups and establishes an opportunity for them to gain an understanding of one another's perceptions and roles. Our intent is to encourage them to continue such collaborative dialogues as they operate in their practitioner realm.

We recently conducted a study to determine student perceptions of the benefits accrued, the problems encountered, and the level of success we have achieved in creating a community of learners. Results indicated that all groups found their cohort experience professionally and personally rewarding. Content outcomes appeared stronger for those in the later cohort groups then those formed in the first few years of program development. Issues of racial understanding, expanded appreciation for diversity, and group support were common themes throughout the data. Participants felt that the model of collaboration and the goal of developing a community of learners, although not totally achieved, established a goal for them in their own work and left them with a determination to create such environments in their own organizations (Twale & Kochan, 1998).

Activities to Enhance Communication Among and Between Varied Groups

Another vital component in developing our community of learners is establishing diverse opportunities for individual and group interaction. Students new to the cohort meet with students in the previous cohort during some of the seminar sessions and in other planned activities. Social events and educational opportunities in which guest speakers share their experiences are conducted throughout the year. One particularly exciting event this past year was a tail-gate party for a home

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football game. Since it was against our greatest football rival, it added another dimension of unity. Students are involved in the planning process for these events which are facilitated by a faculty member with primary responsibility for coordination resting with a graduate student.

A second strategy was the establishment of an effective communication and information dissemination process. This includes an electronic listserve, named com_learn, housed on the University's central server that is used to allow students to communicate with one another in an efficient manner. A bi-annual newsletter was created to share ideas and keep the community informed of happenings, needs, and issues of importance. Faculty assisted by making activity announcements and passing out flyers in their courses. A mailing list of alumni, students, and community leaders was compiled to simplify mailing flyers and other announcements. There is also a web site that has been developed to inform those outside of the university setting of our efforts and to allow them to become a more active part of our technological community which we hope will serve as a hub for information and interaction.

The third strategy was to focus on outreach to program alumni, current students, and community leaders identified as having an expressed interest in our program. Integral to this effort was the establishment of a close working relationship with the College's Alumni and Development Officer. Her commitment to the ideals of community as well as her own agenda in development were well suited for close collaboration. Her contact with alumni throughout the Southeast helped to communicate the "Community of Learners" vision. On several occasions feedback was received from out of state alumni lending vocal support for our initiatives. Outreach activities have included quarterly Speakers' Luncheons. Among the guests speakers have been leadership faculty from other universities, the President of the area Chamber of Commerce, the University's Vice President of Academic Affairs, and Alabama's Principal of the Year, a program alumnus. Students at all levels-certification, doctoral, masters, special students, and alumni-were invited to participate in these events.

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Another aspect of our outreach efforts is the use of calling cards. All students receive calling cards with their name, the name of our program, and the phrase "community of learners," on them. Students are encouraged to use and share these cards to encourage others to join our community and to inform them of our efforts. These cards are also given to all guest speakers and to our alumni. They have been a powerful tool in disseminating the concept of community.

Reflections and Perceptions

Reflecting on our experience in changing the metaphor of our leadership program, we believe we have accomplished a great deal. Our successes include creating a conceptual framework which serves as a guide and beacon for our efforts. We have been able to bring together a diversity of voices to create a mission and vision that reflects a paradigm shift in our program. Our social and educational activities have proven successful in stimulating the creation of a community. Our cohort group members provide support to one another and this approach has been instrumental in enhancing the graduate student experience, particularly for part-time students. Joint research projects, grant writing teams, joint authorships, and mentoring among and between faculty, students, alumni and practitioners have become natural outgrowths of our efforts. The faculty have expanded their capacity to communicate and have come to value one another's ideas and abilities.

Although we believe that our community has made great progress, we continue to struggle with a number of issues. Creating a learning community takes time and requires that faculty make it a priority. Given the demands upon us, it is sometimes difficult to get all faculty to do so. Likewise, our students struggle with their level of involvement. Other responsibilities related to such things as job and family commitments limit their capacity to participate in activities even though they express an interest in helping to create and maintain the community. This becomes particularly difficult when students complete the seminar or coursework and are no longer required to be present on campus. Alumni who go on to other locations, find it especially problematic to

remain involved in community of learner activities. In addition, many students travel as much as two hours to attend class, sometimes making it a hardship for them to come to campus for additional activities.

These obstacles have led us to formulate a number of questions which must be addressed. The first deals with our definition and mental models of the concept of community. We must ask, *"Are they broad enough to encompass the realities of existence beyond the university setting? Are the barriers of time and overlapping responsibilities so overwhelming that we must think of new forms of community ? Would other models, such as the collectives (Michalski, 1995), where knowledge and goods are exchanged in a less personal manner through the use of virtual communities, created through the use technology be more fitting?"* If so, we must consider hat type of virtual community would be most appropriate. Kowch and Schweir (1997) identify four types of virtual communities: relationship, place, mind, and memory. Communities of relationship are based on common concerns such as the support groups found on-line. Community of place is the real time interaction of chat rooms or software.Virtual community of mind reflects common interests and shared values seen in newsgroups and web pages. Community of memory is based on a shared past or history. The community of memory is one which will seem to flow naturally from our history together. Conversely, when considering the creation of virtual communities we must ponder whether these communities, with their inability to translate a person's prana (life-force, presence) (Barlow, 1995), would hinder the development of relationships that we feel are so essential to the building of the collaborative, transformative community we are seeking to create.

Another question we must address is *"To what extent can we sustain the involvement of faculty members in this effort?"* The university culture does not reward or value the time spent in this type of program development. In addition, the demands made upon faculty often make sustained involvement a difficult endeavor. Thus we are struggling with determining what kinds of rewards, benefits, and outcomes can be developed to enhance involvement.

An important query with which we are wrestling is, *"How can we measure whether our efforts are making a change in how our leaders are functioning?"* Although students report that their experiences have broadened their desire and ability to lead in a collaborative manner, we have not as yet developed mechanisms to measure the outcomes. Consequently, we must create new ways of assessing student development on a long-term basis.

Perhaps the most important issues we must face are those that deal with our capacity and ability to challenge our own beliefs and continually grow as learners. Among the questions we must address are: *"To what degree are faculty roles and relationships between one another and between ourselves and the students really changing? To what degree do our personalities, backgrounds, and our own conceptions of our roles serve as barriers to changing roles and relationships between one and another, our students, and members of our community?"* A final, and perhaps the most compelling of all the questions we must address is, *"To what extent are we, as individuals, and as a faculty, willing to reflect on our own strengths,weaknesses, and professional development needs and to become vulnerable to one another in the process?"*

To those interested or engaged in similar endeavors, we offer some insights and thoughts for reflection and dialogue. Establishing a learning community requires several attributes: a faculty that is willing to engage in dialogue about current practices and ways to change those practices; an agreement to work at developing a common vision and mental model about what it takes to become a leader; a willingness to share power and the teaching learning process with students; a willingness to engage in continual self-reflection; and the recognition that all of these aspects are inter-related. In addition to the questions we have posed for ourselves, there are some other issues to consider when embarking upon such a paradigm change. Among them are:

- What are present communication patterns among faculty and to what extent must they be enhanced to allow discussion, dialogue, and change to occur ?
- What kinds of activities might be initiated to garner support and interest in such

change ?

* What are the political realities that might facilitate or hinder such change ?
* What financial and personal resources are available to support the effort ?
* Who should be involved in developing the ideas and actions ?
* What are student needs and how will you determine and verify them ?
* How will you gain and keep the commitment of those involved in planning and implementing the change ?

We also think there are some important lessons we have learned that might be of value to others. First, change of this magnitude is a long-term process that is often frustrating and discouraging. In addition it does not always immediately yield a polished product or outcome. It is essential therefore to build in opportunities to discuss and deal with these frustrations and to set at least a five year timeline for real in-depth change to occur. We know this intellectually. We even teach it in our classes, but dealing with it and knowing it are two different things. Therefore, we find we must be diligent, must encourage one another, and must constantly remind ourselves that change takes time.

When embarking on such change, we believe that the broader and more diverse the voices involved, the greater will be the potential for maintaining and sustaining the activities. However, many Educational Leadership Programs do not appear to incorporate the use of advisory councils and community members in the operation of their programs (Kochan & Twale, 1997). We think this contributes to the development of an insular view of education rather than a communal one. Community members who have political savvy and connections and knowledge in the field of leadership should be visible, vocal, and active participants in this process. In addition to their knowledge and resource base, they bring a level of accountability to the effort which stimulates the drive toward change and enhances faculty and administrative involvement.

The time and energy involved in these efforts is sometimes overwhelming. We suggest that

the leadership within the faculty and student body be rotated in terms of coordinating and facilitating the effort. It is also wise to build student involvement into some of the program and course requirements, to seek graduate assistant help from the administration, to ask for faculty release time, and to find ways of connecting the efforts to publication and research activities

Although the road to creating a learning community within our department has not always been easy, we believe that the challenges have been well worth the effort. The community of learners concept provides us an opportunity to break down the traditional barriers between and among faculty, students, alumni, and community members and enhances the ability of all to understand the concepts of collaboration and interdependence. It is our belief that this will in turn strengthen our capacity to learn from one another and stimulate the development of communities of learners in all of the educational institutions in which we, our students, and our alumni serve.

When we read others' stories dealing with creating similar changes in their environments, we gain intellectually, enhance our desire to learn, and fortify ourselves to pursue this goal. We hope that the story of our experience will provide valuable insights for others as well as all of us proceed on the journey from being organizations to becoming communities.

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Figure 1

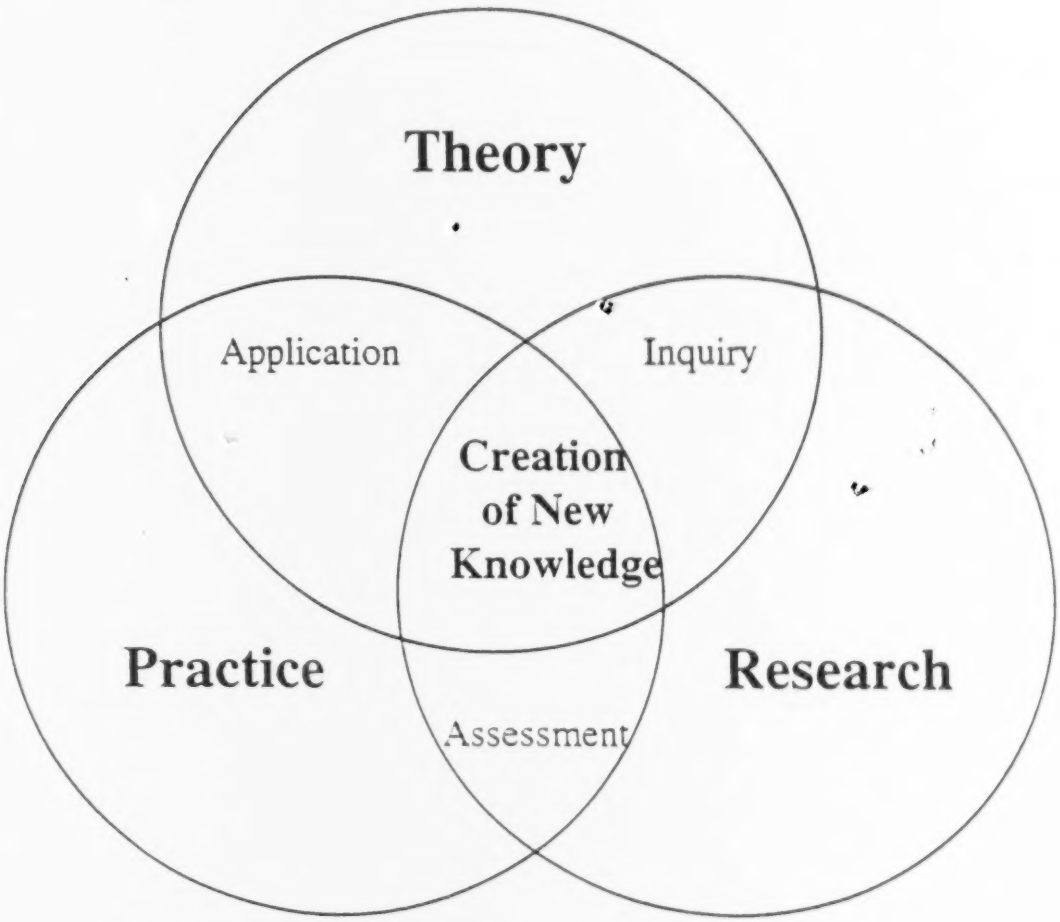
Theory
Application
Inquiry
Creation of New Knowledge
Practice
Research
Assessment

Figure 2